

I had the honor of meeting and interviewing Eilhys England Hackworth, Chairman of the Stand for the Troops (SFTT), which she co-founded with her late husband Col. David “Hack” Hackworth. SFTT, the nonpartisan (501c3) advocate for America’s frontline troops keeps going and growing, continuing to safeguard the physical and mental well-being of men and women deployed on the frontlines.

Col. Hackworth is the inspirational co-founder behind the launch of Stand for the Troops 15 years ago.

England Hackworth explains, “My valiant, wonderful husband, Col David (Hack) Hackworth, one of America’s greatest heroes and most valor-decorated soldiers, died in my arms 5 years ago this past May. During the last weeks we shared, he thought not a wit about himself; and his love for me burned so brightly. I still feel surrounded by the awesome warmth. But, he worried too about the frontline troops he spent his life protecting, and particularly about Stand for the Troops, the foundation we started together. So, I promised Hack I would pick up the torch and keep SFTT viable—and continue our commitment to get the kids out at the tip of the spear, the best leadership, training and equipment.”

# STAND FOR THE TROOPS: Picking up the Torch

The nonpartisan (501c3) advocate for America’s frontline troops keeps going and growing, continuing to safeguard the physical and mental well-being of men and women deployed on the frontlines.

By Lorraine Cancro

“I knew it would not be easy... in spite of the major stories we broke—such as the lack of up-to-date body armor, or none at all, when the troops first went back into Iraq or the unarmored Hummers; or Abu Ghraib which pointed so clearly to flaws in both training and leadership—most people we addressed when we tried to raise aware-

ness and funds found it difficult to accept that our soldiers and Marines were not getting the right stuff with which to wage war. Even though we eventually came to expect the disconnect, we always found it hard to compute. But that was because for many years, we were often first to report outrages like the Tillman cover-up in our weekly column *Defending America*, which Hack would also discuss every week on TV and radio. To disbelieving ears, of course; but he kept getting booked because he had better pundit credit than most and good ‘TV-Q,’ probably because he was as quick and deadly with words as he had been in battle.”

England Hackworth states, “Only recently have I noticed that we are gaining more traction, and I suspect it is mainly because the Walter Reed debacle so deeply shocked and touched the nation. Suddenly, we are all confronting what Hack had warned us about on Larry King when we first went into Iraq: in spite of all our vows to the contrary, we have allowed ourselves to be sucked into another Vietnam with far greater





potential fall-out. Sure, because of medical and technological advances, we will not have a black granite wall listing 58,000 fallen warriors; but depending upon how much longer we are stuck in Iraq, we are likely to have far more than 58,000 wounded, many grievously.”

Excellent organizations offer countless services to take care of the troops, from entertaining them in Iraq, to helping them and their families when they come home. The USO, Wounded Warrior, Fisher House and so on. However, no organization, except SFTT, is dedicated day in, day out, to being there for our stalwart warriors as they stand tall for their country out in the shifting sands of the Valley of the Shadow of Death—to try to prevent them from being killed or wounded in the first place.

SFTT’s mission is to get the troops the best available, basic five critical pieces of combat gear that give them the best chance possible to come home alive and in one piece—helmet, rifle, sidearm, boots and body armor. England Hackworth has the lowdown on all of

them, thanks, she said, “to years of brainwashing by my husband.” She says the equipment we send out troops into harm’s way with is lethally sub-standard.

The helmets our troops use in Iraq and Afghanistan, she said, are not up to the technology that exists today. Not only that, she added, they are also so

grotesquely uncomfortable that soldier tend to not want to wear them.

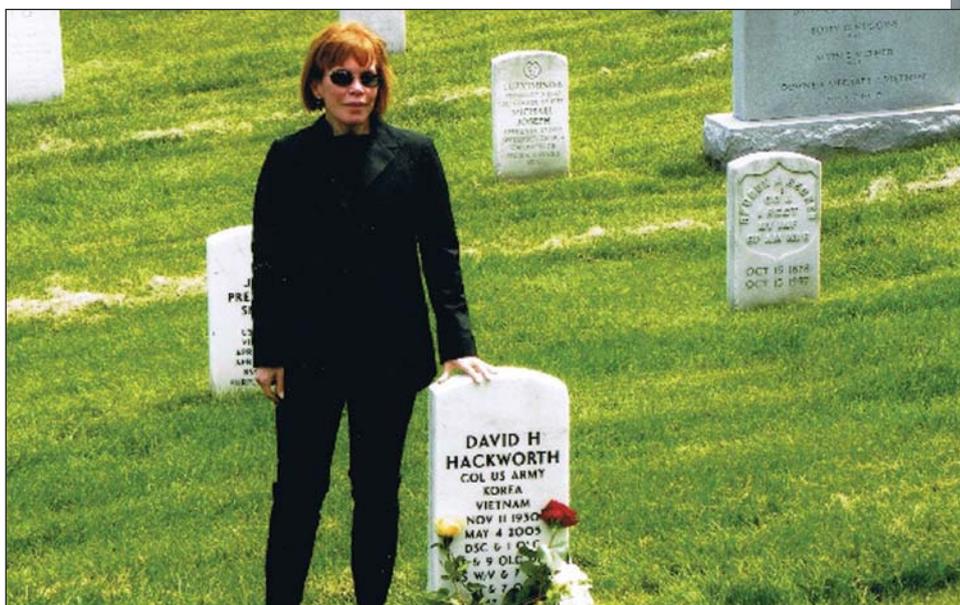
“To me, as an American citizen,” she said, “it is extremely offensive that our football players have more effective and more comfortable helmets than our front line troops:18- and 19-year-old kids, out at the tip of the spear, protecting our cushy good life. These kids deserve to come back and enjoy it too.”

The standard issue rifle is a “jammer,” England Hackworth said; a variant of the rifle issue in Vietnam. Ask Jessica Lynch, the West Virginia private who was taken prisoner during an ambush in Iraq in 2003. In 2007, she told Congress that her M-16 rifle had jammed and she was never able to fire it.

As for side arms, the bullets that standard issue pistol shoot “can’t stop a determined opponent,” England Hackworth said. “People can fire five shots into a determined opponent and they will still keep coming at you, perhaps take you down.”

Boots should be appropriate to the mission and the terrain. An infantry army travels on its feet.

“You can do the math,” she said. “If they do not have the right shoes, they cannot make the distance to do their missions. Clearly, you do not give somebody the footwear if they are in the mud some-



## Stand for The Troops

where than if they are in the sand. And, that is what they do. They tried to develop an all-purpose thing. There is no such animal.”

She said SFTT would be reaching out to Nike to see if it could develop “the right foot stuff.” Then would come the business of swaying the Department of Defense (DoD) procurement system to use it, a chore that takes “time and public outcry.”

“It is not a question of money,” she said. “That is ridiculous. We pay \$400,000 to families for the death of a soldier. And, that is a drop in the bucket compared to taking care of people when they come home missing half their brain or both legs.”

“There is no way that one organization—or 50 organizations—could raise the money and buy our own equipment and send it to the troops.”

Her strategy is to “take truth to power.” It is to get senators and congressmen to initiate inquiries.

As of last week, that strategy has started to pay off with the fifth item of vital gear—body armor. “We have accomplished what corporations pay lobbyists billions of dollars to do, with just our outreach of who we can go to,” England Hackworth said, “because they know we talk the truth.”

Meanwhile, thanks in no small part to the advocacy and influence of SFTT, the Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates questioning the DoD’s acquisition, testing and quality assurance of its body armor and armored vehicles and inviting the DoD to the Hill for briefing.

The letter cites a report from the Defense Department’s own inspector general that found “the body armor that was recorded as having passed testing had actually failed.”

“That is more than an intellectual accomplishment,” England Hackworth said, “It will result, we hope, in a lot coming out that should. Stand for the Troops is a little tiny engine that could.”



SFTT has also launched a PTSD initiative which has mobilized a top medical task force to give seriously traumatized warriors access to the latest Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)/Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) therapeutic modalities, collaborating with CDS Warrior Salute on a Pilot Treatment Program, and developing a comprehensive national referral resource. This mission is high priority: PTSD affects one in every five soldiers and Marines, twenty per cent returning from Iraq and Afghanistan; while, overall, about 18 veterans a day commit suicide.

Chairing the PTSD initiative are Major General John Batiste, US Army, Ret. and medical Co-chair Henry Grayson, PhD. To facilitate the effort, SFTT has formed a medical advisory task force including the most prominent in the field of mental health, including renowned psychiatrist Robert Cancro, MD Chairman Emeritus of NYU Langone Medical Center’s Department of Psychiatry, Grant Brenner, MD of New York’s William Allenson White Institute, and Jaine Darwin of Harvard. SFTT is already liaising with the offices of Senators Richard Blumenthal (CT), Joe Lieberman (CT) and Jim Webb (VA).

Future plans include perfecting the Rochester Pilot Treatment Program and expanding there first, and then eventually replicating the program in Westchester or Southern Connecticut and the West Coast.

New awareness activities include STAND FOR THE TROOPS, a series of comedy benefits which kicked off at Caroline’s/NYC with Lewis Black on September 12th followed by Colin Quinn, Dennis Leary et al at Caroline’s and other venues in Chicago, Los Angeles and Nashville. Additionally, Maxim, Men’s Health and Esquire have committed to running full-page adver-

tisements announcing our first annual “Photos from the Front” contest for our warriors who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. “Photos from the Front” will create an evocative photographic collection taken of, and by, our frontline troops in combat—stirring images that reference the battlefields where PTSD/TBI becomes embedded and where our warriors risk their lives daily, protecting us.

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“I loved my husband so much I would have followed him anywhere. I told him that I thought he was brainwashing me every night: ‘You will help me help the troops,’” she said with a smile. Hack’s original rifle rests on the mantle above the fireplace in her living room. “Who else would extort on their death bed a promise from their wife who adored him to do this?”

England Hackworth adds, “It seems criminal that the richest nation in the world cannot budget responsibly enough to provide its sons and daughters with a helmet that will prevent many more of the endemic life-altering head injuries...With the same better body armor the generals choose – and wear hidden under their uniforms... With a rifle that is not a ‘jammer’ like Jessica Lynch’s M-16, the terrorists’ weapon-of-choice...With a sidearm that is reliable and deadly in tight situations...And, with boots capable of going the bloody distance.”

No wonder Hack died, still worried about the troops. If more Americans stay mindful of the dreadful consequences of war and help SFTT carry Hack’s torch, we can together “support the troops with more than lip service,” and make sure more of our brave volunteers survive whatever lies ahead.

## ‘Col. David Hackworth A Man Who Truly Supported the Troops’

The nation lost an amazing hero and leader on May 4th, 2006 when Col. David Hackworth, a champion of the common soldier died of cancer at age 74.

Hackworth was a man who could be mentioned in the same breath as Alvin York and Audie Murphy, except that Hackworth’s battlefield exploits took place in dozens of battles in two wars. He was put in for the Medal of Honor three times. In several years of combat in Korea and Vietnam, he won the Army’s second highest honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, twice, along with 10 Silver Stars, eight Bronze Stars and eight Purple Hearts.

In short, he was a warrior of the first order. When he spoke out on shoddy training and equipment in his weekly “Defending America” columns, he had credibility gained from successfully leading units into combat.

When he attached the “ticket punching” mentality of officers who put career advancement ahead of soldiering, he spoke from the hard personal experience of watching the Army’s leadership disintegrate in careerism. In Hackworth’s world, there were two types of people—“studs” and “perfumed princes.” A stud was someone who knew his job and did it well, someone who was fearless, resourceful and utterly reliable when things got tough. Perfumed princes was Hackworth’s epithet for officers who had their eyes on becoming generals and rarely got their hands dirty doing actual soldiering.

When he questioned the strategy of the Bush’s administration’s operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the criticism was coming from a man who literally wrote the books (“The Vietnam Primer” and “Steel My Soldiers’ Hearts”) on guerrilla warfare. In a time when billions of dollars are being shoveled in to buying weapons that are unneeded and unworkable on a battlefield, Hackworth knew—again, from years in combat experience—that every battle from Lexington and Concord to the Sunni Triangle is won or lost by the man with the rifle—the infantryman.

That was why, of all the awards bestowed upon Hackworth, he was proudest of this Combat Infantryman Badge. There is only one way to get one: serve in a front-line infantry unit for 90 days under fire, and survive.

Hackworth knew the key to surviving in combat was good training. He learned the trade from the World War II sergeants who fought across Europe and stayed in the Army, after the war was on. These were the toughest of the tough and they passed on what they had learned to the next generation of soldiers.

Their credo was simple: the harder you trained for combat, the less likely you were to die when the bullets were real. Good, hard training, combined with total discipline and accountability, produced skilled, fearless soldiers.

In the words of Steve Prazenka, the platoon sergeant who trained Hackworth: “If you learn it right, you will do it right for the rest of your life. If you learn it wrong, you will do it wrong and spend the rest of your life trying to learn to do it right.”

Hackworth readily embraced this, and carried it with him for the rest of his career. No unit Hackworth commanded was ever lacking in training



and discipline and he did whatever it took to get his troops ready to fight.

Good training is the foundation of good leadership. The rest can be found in the principles of another man who was deeply influenced by Hackworth, Col. Glover Johns. Hackworth loved to quote John’s basic philosophy of soldiering.

- Strive to do small things well.
- Be a doer and a self-starter—aggressiveness and initiative are two most admired qualities in a leader—but you must also put your feet up and think.
- Strive through self-improvement through constant self-evaluation.
- Never be satisfied. Ask of any project, “How can it be done better?”
- Do not over-inspect and over-supervise. Allow your leaders to make mistakes in training, so they

can profit from the errors and not make them in combat.

- Keep the troops informed; telling them “what, how and why” builds their confidence.
- The harder the training, the more troops will brag.
- Enthusiasm, fairness, and moral and physical courage – four of the most important aspects of leadership.
- Showmanship- a vital technique of leadership.
- The ability to speak and write well—two essential tools of leadership.
- There is a salient difference between profanity and obscenity; while a leader employs profanity (tempered with discretion), he never uses obscenities.
- Have consideration for others.
- Yelling detracts from your dignity; take men aside to counsel them.
- Understand and use your judgment; know when to stop fighting for something you believe is right. Discuss and argue your point of view until a decision is made, and then support the decision wholeheartedly.
- Stay ahead of your boss.

These are traits of good leaders in any field. Sadly, the people who live up to them are few and far between. However, when you find a person who has these qualities, you will follow them gladly and with pride.

Few things got Hackworth madder than seeing grunts get the short end of the stick. That is why he devoted his energies in the last two decades of his life to making sure soldiers got what they needed; and the ponies who sent them off on dubious missions were called out and held accountable.

Hackworth was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery on May 31st, 2006. His legacy is the group “Stand for the Troops”. His 1989 autobiography, “About Face: The Odyssey of an American Warrior,” will be read for years to come by all who are seeking the nuts and bolts of leadership. And, most of all, his example of speaking out in favor of common sense when it comes to defending the nation will be remembered by all who know the difference between saying you support the troops and actually doing so.

For more information go to [www.sftt.org](http://www.sftt.org).